The European Rural Parliament Manifesto 2022

PREAMBLE

We, rural people of Europe, are:

Acclaiming the common European democratic, social values, the human rights and the UN sustainable development goals;
Appreciating rural diversity and rural heritage, the feeling of community and rural people´s commitment; **Being aware** of the lack of rural discourse and will in politics, policies, values, valuation and rural development;
Conscious of the distance between decision-making and rural actors;
Concerned about exodus, the climate challenges, the declining economies and services, poverty and social exclusion.

We see the future of rural Europe as vibrant, inclusive and sustainable rural communities, supported by diversified and prospering economies, and by effective stewardship of high-quality environmental and cultural heritage. We believe that rural communities can be major long-term contributors to a prosperous, peaceful, just and equitable Europe, and to a sustainable global society. Our ambition is to encourage action at village and community level throughout rural Europe, creating in due course a pan European rural community or village movement.

We ask the European NGO networks which co-initiated the European Rural Parliament to lead a programme of advocacy and action based on this Manifesto, working closely with their national members and all willing partners.

We believe that rural communities, the governments and the multi-national institutions, working together, can achieve a revitalisation of the rural regions of Europe and we pledge our own continued commitment to the pursuit of the vision and actions outlined in this Manifesto.

The original European Rural Parliament (ERP) Manifesto was adopted at the conclusion of the 2nd European Rural Parliament held 4th to 6th November 2015 at Schärding, Austria. It was updated and approved at the 3rd European Rural Parliament held 18th to 21st October 2017 in Venhorst, Netherlands and 4th European Rural Parliament 6th to 9th November in Candás Asturias. The 2022 Manifesto update was agreed during 5th European Rural Parliament 12th to 15th September in Kielce, Poland.

MANIFESTO

We, representatives of many people and organisations rooted in rural areas across the continent of Europe, have adopted this European Rural Manifesto as a statement of the aspirations, commitments and demands of rural people, villages and communities drawing upon meetings, campaigns and policy discussions since 2013.

1. Diversity of rural areas:

We deeply appreciate both the unity of Europe and the wide diversity of its rural areas and peoples, arising from the varied geomorphology, climate and biodiversity of land and sea and from the long history of human activity across the continent. We see this unity and this variety, as expressed in human culture and natural resources, as an enormous asset for the future well-being of all peoples in Europe.

2. Common values:

We acclaim the common values which bind the people of Europe – *democracy, equality, respect to each other, social welfare, sustainability, the rule of law, recognition of human rights, and the spirit of cooperation*. These values are currently challenged by political forces in some parts of Europe and by global systems. We are committed to sustaining these values, in order to create a peaceful and socially just Europe.

3. Quality of life:

The countryside, farms, villages and small towns, the coastal margins and islands, mountains and forests with their local cultures, people and communities, wildlife, landscapes, healthy environments, cultural heritage, and the social strength, self-government and mutual support found in rural communities, form the basis of a good quality of life in rural areas that should be valued and cherished for future generations. We express our concern that these rural features and values are challenged by exodus, decline and migration of skilled people.

4. Rights:

We assert the right of rural areas, villages and communities to full recognition by all the people and institutions of Europe, to a quality of life and standard of living not poorer to that of urban populations, and to full participation and rural voices taken into account in political processes. We ask governments at all levels to endorse that right for all people living in rural areas. In all aspects of policy and action related to rural communities, people should be afforded equal rights irrespective of age, gender, sexuality, ability, ethnicity, faith or geography.

5. Concern about the appreciation of rural values and conditions:

European rural people, villages and communities are concerned that many regions are affected by the narrowness of rural economies, the lack of opportunities, the loss of population, the consequent demographic imbalance, the decline in services, the poverty, the lack of affordable housing and social exclusion among disadvantaged people, asylum seekers or ethnic minorities, increasing vulnerability and environmental degradation. **We are concerned about that urban and growth thinking have been dominating the political discourse and development policies at national and European levels.** The distance between politicians, decisionmakers and rural actors is visible in politics, policies, actions and communication. The development potential and economic added value provided by rural people and resources is not fully recognised. The rural civil society is under-represented in policy processes nationally and in the EU where stronger "rural" voices dominate the debate.

6. Reversing the spiral of decline:

Many regions are affected by a 'downward spiral' in the vitality of rural communities. Loss of population particularly of young people - leads to reduced viability of rural services and weakened local economies, which prompts more loss of population. **We call for concerted efforts by all rural stakeholders, relevant**

agencies, regions and governments to 'reverse the spiral' by: looking for flexible decentralised solutions; working in partnerships at all levels to enable rural economies to grow and prosper; implementing social policy instruments such as *'minimum income support'* and *"support for social insurance',* availability to quality housing; recognising new opportunities to strengthen rural services; supporting the diversification of rural economies; and enabling and encouraging young people to remain in, return to, or move to rural areas.

7. <u>The need for action:</u>
We believe that these challenges must be addressed, for the benefit of the whole population of Europe. We all depend on food, timber, fibre, energy, water, air and minerals produced in rural areas. Farmers, enterprises and other rural actors create a common wealth for Europe. Rural areas contribute greatly to the amelioration of climate change, recreation, public health, bio and cultural diversity and social, economic and spiritual well-being. The countryside deserves the respect of all citizens and, in particular, those responsible for all levels of power, including politicians and big business.

8. <u>Leadership:</u>
We know that we have a responsibility to provide leadership and to act towards our own individual and collective well-being. Leadership in rural development involves collective action from local, regional, national and European levels and is characterised by commitment, communication, cooperation, common strategic values and vision and building trust.

9. <u>Partnership between governments and local stakeholders:</u>
We believe that effective rural development demands an open-minded and innovative partnership between governments and stakeholders at all levels of decision-making process, including civil society, local businesses, local institutions and local governments and people, all as equals. **We call upon rural stakeholders to work positively with governments, and upon governments, international institutions and appropriate agencies to establish meaningful systems of consultation, collaborative decision-making and adequate resources in order to shape and implement policies and to lay a strong foundation for fruitful partnership between rural stakeholders and governments at all levels.**

10. <u>A supportive context:</u>
We call on governments and the EU to act in a spirit of trustful and open-minded partnership with villages and rural communities, recognising their right to self-determination, and provide the support of law, regulation, administration and finance. We advocate a full commitment to participative democracy and the rule of law;rural proofing of all relevant policies and programmes; coherence between different aspects and geographical levels of policy across the whole field of government action related to rural areas; enabling digital solutions, simplified design, and sensitive and flexible use, of regulatory, fiscal and financial systems to encourage initiative by individuals, micro, small and medium-sized enterprises, social enterprises, cooperatives and others; and respect for the rights of rural communities in forging international laws and treaties.

11. <u>Policy framework</u>

We endorse and appreciate the messages from EU on improving the public awareness, recognizing the rural identity, increasing the attractivity of rural areas, better coordinated EU-policies and integrative, participative and partnership approaches with local communities, including the Cork 2.0 Declaration, the Long Term Vision for Rural Areas and connected Action Plan and Rural Pact that should be endorsed also in national level. **We call for cooperation between all stakeholders to fulfil these objectives, implement and request from member states more concrete steps (action plan) and support the strong role of local level stakeholders in shaping and implementing these policy ambitions with necessary support.**
We ask for an inclusive partnership approach to fulfil the TFEU (Treaty on the Functioning of the EU) article 174 obligations.

12. Poverty and exclusion:

We recognise the progress that has been made in fighting poverty and social exclusion in Europe, but millions of people are still afflicted by poverty and social exclusion of different kinds. **Social and territorial cohesion are integral to our vision of Europe. We call for sustained effort to promote inclusion and full participation in society; urgent action to change the situation of European rural citizens affected by extreme poverty, food insecurity and lack of hope for a better future.**.

13. Climate change and environment

We note with high concern the growing evidence of the very serious direct and indirect impact of climate change. Against that background, we support the multi-national commitments made at the United Nations Conferences on Climate Change and urge EU, all European governments and all stakeholders to act urgently on the basis of those commitments. **We welcome the Green Deal of the EU and expect actions to be implemented in villages and communities based on the Deal. We highlight the major role which rural communities can play in bringing about the transformation needed to avert climate and ecological catastrophe and recognise the need to assist rural areas to adapt to climate change and ensure that they are not penalised by climate obligations. Cooperation with the local level should be reinforced.**

Natural resources

Our natural resources have great potential to reduce and address climate change, including substantial forests, peatlands and wetlands which can capture and sequester carbon, and which contribute massively to renewable resources of raw material and energy. Rural or coastal areas are well placed to meet the growing demand for renewable energy from wind, hydro, tide, solar, geothermal and wood-fuel sources, in ways which respect nature and the environment of land and water, and which bring direct benefit and employment to rural communities. Attention should be given on how the benefits from the exploitation and management of local natural resources are distributed. **We call for local stakeholders to have a stronger influence over the natural resources.**

We ask for increased use of agro-forestry, agro-ecology and bio-economy approaches to land management, and for a greater focus on local, community-led responses, and community-based conservation and restoration initiatives - including the acknowledgement of Indigenous and Community Conserved Areas which empower local citizens and provide the necessary conditions for a just and inclusive transition. Attention should be paid to responsible climate actions, limiting greenwashing that are resulting in rising land prices, planting of the wrong kinds of forests in the wrong places etc. **We also urge** that the conditions created by climate change currently and as foreseen should be taken into account in all rural Europe not forgetting disadvantaged regions when assessing the allocation of financial support.

14. Civil Society Networks:

The European and national networks and organisations which have led this European Rural Parliament campaign are rooted in local action and participative democracy. Their members include thousands of village level action groups, local associations, cooperatives and other structures which run essential services and promote cooperation among rural actors. They have a growing role in practical action in rural areas, in the face of changes in the profile of public-sector actors. **We call upon governments and European institutions to recognise the vital contribution of NGOs and their networks, to respect their independence and to support their activities. We ask for real, meaningful and engaging civil society participation in designing and delivering European programmes.**

15. Youth:

We call on governments and civil society to recognise and meet the needs of youth and to enable young people to participate actively in political processes and in rural action. We recognise young people as key drivers of rural development. Young people may be ready to remain in or move into rural areas to take responsibility as farmers, rural entrepreneurs or citizens for the future well-being of rural economies and communities if supportive policies, measures and systems create a favourable environment, so that

knowledge, abilities and skills of young people are valued as equal to other generations.
This includes access standards-compliant infrastructure of broadband and mobility in order for youth to fully use the possibilities of modern technologies known to them, so that youth can give contribution to diversify economy, promote sustainable farming and food production, create access to high-quality public services and housing that are significant also for all rural newcomers.

16. Women:

The role that women play in ensuring the sustainability of rural households and communities, improving rural livelihoods and overall wellbeing, should be recognised to keep rural areas alive. Gender-related inequalities exist in land-heritage systems in parts of Europe and in male-favouring project budgeting. **We call on governments to develop gender proofed rural policies and support empowerment of rural women and their organisations to participate in all aspects of rural life, including stronger involvement in decision making. An inviting environment, flexible, entrepreneurial and digital solutions should be considered.**

17. Elderly people:

Rural and remote areas experience more pronounced and impactful population ageing than urban areas. Lower population density and more geographically dispersed populations make it more difficult and expensive to create and maintain a comprehensive service infrastructure. Combined with poorer socio economic conditions, rural populations are at a disadvantage compared to urban ones. Social isolation risks and health care deficits are increased. **We urge policies to be flexible and sensitive to local variations, designed and implemented at a local or regional level, and supported by higher levels of government. Strategies should be collaborative and partnerships between local authorities and local villages and communities are encouraged.**

18. Migration:

The arrival in Europe of refugees and other desperate people from areas of war and conflicts, climate disaster and of people from poor countries seeking work, is provoking thought and action within our networks. Migration effects in the rural areas should be seen as opportunity to repopulate in Europe's rural areas supported by integration, social and other policies and support programs. **While urging governments and other agencies to work urgently to solve the underlying causes of this crisis, we call for a warm-hearted response, based on solidarity between peoples. We believe that for many rural areas, and particularly those with declining populations, this offers an opportunity to integrate refugees and other newcomers.**

Local governments and civil society organisations are well placed to lead and implement such efforts of integration.

19. Small and family farms:

We recognise the major contribution that commercial farms make to the European economy. However, we are gravely concerned for the well-being of the many millions of small family farms, especially in remote areas, mountains and islands.
Small and family farms may retain viability by forming partnerships, cooperatives and social farming enterprises, adding value collectively to their products, diversifying their farm incomes and local economies and gradually forming larger land units. Short supply chains should be valued as contributing to local economy and environment. **We urge governments, donors, civil society organisations and rural communities to recognise and support small family farming as a viable and respected European model, and to support generation shifts in farming and the entry of new and young farmers. We ask that our small farms are protected and supported, and that unnecessary bureaucratic obstacles are not created for them.**

20. Villages:

Villages are the hearts of rural social life and for many people places to live and work. Due to exodus, decline in services and population, resulting in some cases from political or economic decisions, villagers often take action to find smart innovative and often voluntary-based solutions to the problems. We call for EU-supported national policies and programmes on smart place-based development reflecting and accepting local (even shrinking) realities and possibilities, including mandatory both LEADER and CLLD. We support bottom-up partnerships where people, communities, entrepreneurs and financial support systems meet using existing structures like LEADER-groups or similar actors and Village Pact to be promoted

21. Small towns:

Small towns, which number thousands in Europe, have crucial importance as social, economic and cultural centres for rural communities. However, they are not recognised as a major target of national or European policies and programmes, often being perceived as neither rural nor urban. **We advocate a mainstream European Union policy focused on small towns recognising all the important contributions they make in the social and economic structures of rural regions and their vitality, and for greater focus on the needs of small towns in national policies.**

22. Rural-urban connections:

We welcome the growing interest, in both rural and urban areas, in Community-Led Local Development. We call for increased and sustainable cooperation between communities, organisations, entrepreneurs and authorities in rural and urban areas in order to gain the full benefit of social, cultural and economic links such cooperation can bring, and for vigorous exchange of ideas and good practice between those involved in rural and urban areas.

23. Local and sub-regional economies:

The rural regions of Europe embrace thousands of local and sub-regional economies, rich in micro, small and medium-sized enterprises, including a growing number of the social and community enterprises. These form the lifeblood of villages and communities and contribute greatly to the broader economies of European nations. Policies and programmes should concentrate more on strengthening social and community enterprises established for disadvantaged rural citizens. **We assert the great importance of enhancing the vitality and viability of these local and sub-regional economies throughout rural Europe utilising locally appropriate and innovative approaches.** Of high importance is the provision of versatile advisory, business support and credit services, plus vocational and community education and training, accurately geared to the existing and potential job opportunities. **We call on EU and governments to support local rural economies.**

24. LEADER and CLLD:

We strongly advocate a territorial, integrated and partnership-based approach to rural development, pursued in a bottom-up and place-based spirit. We wish to see the widespread application of the LEADER principle, and its extension into Community Led Local Development, both within and beyond the EU. We are highly concerned by the current lack, in many countries, of a truly integrated process of regional and rural development and about loss of civic participation in LEADER implementation. **We urge institutions and governments to demonstrate trust in Local Action Groups, to expand and earmark funding from EARDF as well as mandatory inclusion of other funds as CLLD (EMFAF, ESF, ERDF as well as RRF, MMF).** We ask for institutions and governments to adapt and simplify their rules and procedures to the needs of rural communities, and to ensure a truly integrated approach to local development and to the use of multiple funds. **We urge governments to lay the groundwork of partnership between sectors for the use of LEADER and CLLD.** Clear and long-term policies and programmes are needed to contribute to this process that could change the situation of local rural societies and to stop emigration of rural citizens.

25. <u>Rural Services and infrastructure:</u>

Basic rural services, such as shops, postal services, schools, primary health care and public transport as well as social infrastructure, are vital, underpinning to the quality of life in rural areas. Adequate physical infrastructure – water supplies, sewerage systems, electricity, energy supplies, transport systems – is a necessity. In many rural regions, rural services are weak or being lost and infrastructure is inadequate, which can contribute further to a vicious cycle of decline. There are many good examples in Europe to show how rural social enterprises and non-profit organisations can provide the necessary services in alternative and sustainable ways, if they are recognised as partners by the government. **We call upon governments and service providers to recognise the right of rural people to adequate infrastructure and reasonable access to all basic services, and to enable rural communities to make decisions and take actions to secure services and infrastructure appropriate for their needs. New decentralised models of providing services through partnerships or contractual relations could be tried also and enabling citizen initiatives to solve lack/loss of services.**

Mobility

Mobility should be recognised as a right for every person to have affordable, accessible transport across rural areas. Such mobility should be eco-friendly with minimum effect on climate and have shared connection and integration with other services. **We ask rural mobility to be included in all national rural development policies, indicating the minimum level of service for all types of areas and defining responsibilities for their provision.**

26. <u>Communication and digitisation:</u>

Access to high-capacity telecommunications is crucial to the social, cultural and economic life of all Europeans and to the provision of vital services. Because of their distance and sparse population, rural areas especially have needs for effective telecommunications. However, many rural areas in Europe are still gravely disadvantaged by weaknesses in telecommunication systems. Digital technologies should be considered as an enabler to transform the rural economy and rural society. We expect digitisation efforts and the Smart Village processes to benefit large rural areas throughout Europe, not only the wealthiest. We call on governments, multi-national funders and telecommunication providers to work urgently on facilitating access to high-speed broadband and mobile services for all rural populations, including remote areas, with harmonised tariffs throughout Europe. Rural communities should not be expected but be enabled to take action in partnerships to ensure this service. Access for digital infrastructure should be ensured also for the disadvantaged and digital capacities should be strengthened. Access to appropriate statistics and data for decision-making should be readily available to rural stakeholders.

27. <u>Education:</u>

In a changing and digitalised world, people everywhere need constantly to enhance their ability to adapt and innovate in social and economic activity. For this reason, education and lifelong learning – starting in early childhood – have a crucial place in enabling rural communities to thrive. They have particular importance in enabling young people to understand the opportunities for a rich and viable life in the countryside, to attain and constantly renew the skills which are needed, and to participate as citizens. **We urge educational authorities to ensure effective access for rural communities to good quality education services by decentralised solutions where possible, including primary schools at village level, secondary and adult education, distance learning, volunteering and vocational training suited to the realities of rural life.**

28. <u>EU enlargement and neighbourhood policies:</u>

Rural communities in EU candidate countries, potential candidate and neighbouring countries are deeply affected by the political instability, delays in political reforms, lack of rural recognition and lack integrated rural thinking. The exodus of people, brains and entrepreneurs, poverty, the lack of cooperation and partnerships are causing economic and social problems**.** We are willing to work together and we invite all to enable maximum partnership and exchange of knowledge, skills, systems and infrastructure.

National EU accession processes and rural programming like LEADER are slow. There is need to strengthen LEADER and support to the third sector in candidate and non-accession countries. We recognize EU insisting upon criteria, but there should be more to enable the candidate countries to meet those criteria. **We urge governments and the EU to speed up the accession process (in an inclusive way) with much more effective programming and financial support to rural economic, civic and social development processes. Partnerships at all levels and place-based entrepreneurship should be encouraged by decision-makers.**

29. <u>International exchanges:</u>

We believe that the work to achieve sustainable rural development can be greatly assisted and accelerated by an exchange of good practices among rural stakeholders and governments within and outwith the EU. All can equally contribute to, and gain from, such exchanges. **We call for a truly pan-European approach to exchange programmes creating opportunities rather than obstacles, through cooperation between governments, NGOs, multi-national donors and others within and beyond the EU.** Supporting mechanisms and well-designed programs for receiving support and implementation should be in place. Young people must be included as equal partners in these exchanges. A leading contribution to this process should be made by the CAP Network for Rural Development and the EU-funded National Rural Networks in all EU member states.

Rural Europe Shall Live
All Europe Shall Live